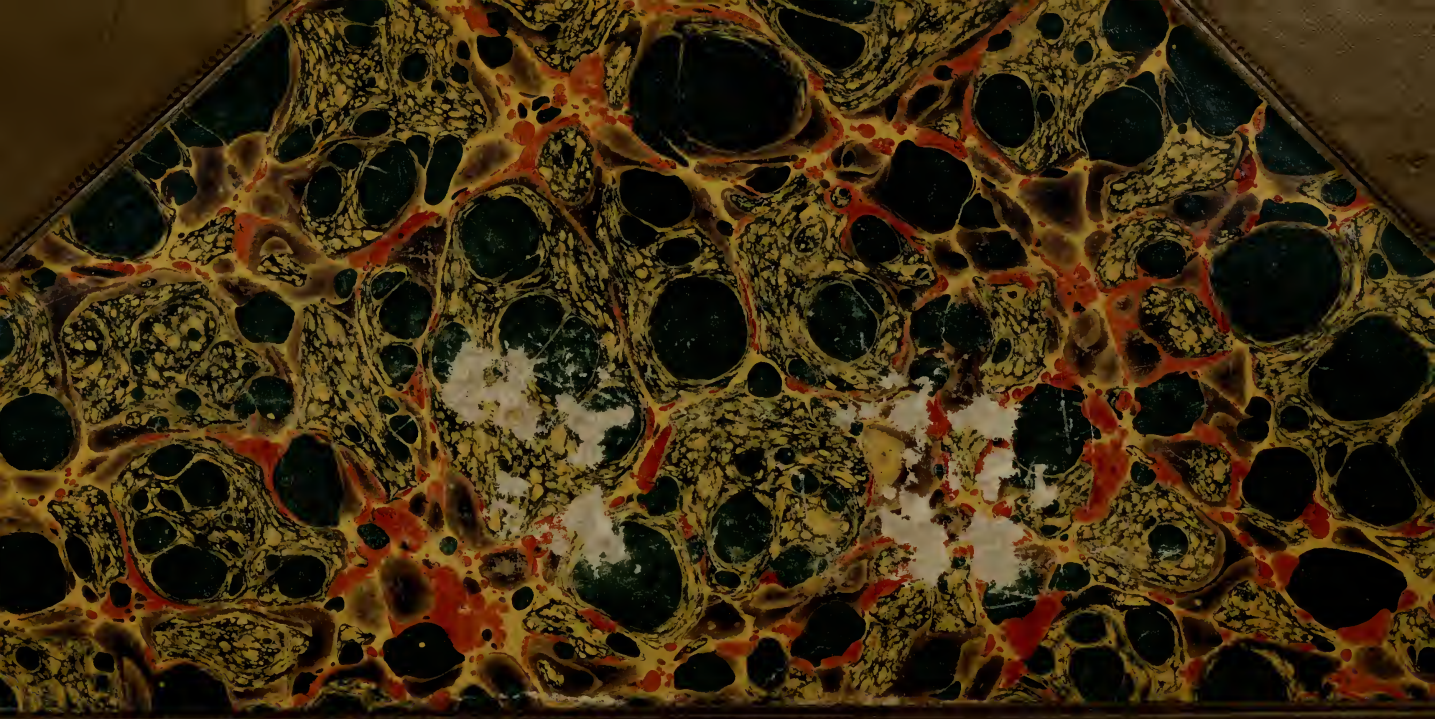

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WOMAN SUFFRAGE:

A REPLY.

BY

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WOMAN SUFFRAGE: A REPLY.

THE recent utterance of Mr. Goldwin Smith against Woman Suffrage has been for many friends of the cause, it may be confessed, a painful surprise. It seemed strange and almost portentous that the voice which had been so often, so boldly, and so eloquently raised on behalf of Liberal principles, should suddenly be heard issuing from the Conservative camp, in opposition to a measure which many Liberals regard as amongst the most important of pending reforms. No one, however, who has read Mr. Smith's essay will have any doubt that the opinions expressed in it—urged as they are with all his characteristic energy—are as genuine and sincere as anything he has ever written on the Liberal side. Whether he has made any converts to his views amongst the supporters of the movement he has attacked, is more than I can say; but as one of those who have not been convinced by his reasonings, I wish to state in what they seem to me to be unsatisfactory, and why, having given them my best consideration, I still remain in my former state of mind.

There is one portion of Mr. Smith's remarks into which, I may as well say here at the outset, I do not propose to follow him. I refer to what he has said of Mr. Mill's relations with his wife, and of his estimate of her mental powers. These are points respecting which, in my opinion, the data do not exist, at least within reach of the general public, for

forming a trustworthy opinion. They are, moreover, absolutely irrelevant to the practical controversy, which should be decided, as Mr. Smith himself in his essay confesses, "on its merits," "the interest of the whole community" being the test, and not by what people may think as to the life and opinions of any individual, however eminent. Further, their discussion cannot but inflict the keenest pain on more than one living person, who, from the nature of the case, are precluded from defending those whom they hold dear. To employ such arguments, therefore, is to use poisoned shafts; and I should have thought that Mr. Goldwin Smith would be about the last man living to resort to such modes of warfare.

Nor is this the only topic introduced by Mr. Smith into this discussion, which might, if not with advantage, at least without detriment to his argument, have been omitted. In his criticism of Mr. Mill's view of the historical origin of the present disabilities of women, there is much the connection of which with the practical question now before the English public it is not very easy to discern. When indeed Mr. Mill first took the question up, the discussion of this aspect of the case was imperatively demanded; because the thing then to be done was, not simply to find arguments to prove the expediency of admitting women to the suffrage, but first of all, and most difficult of all, to gain a hearing for his cause—to make some impression on the solid mass of prejudice that was arrayed against any consideration of the subject; and this could only be done by showing the factitious nature of the existing relation of the sexes. Accordingly, Mr. Mill addressed himself to this task, and in his work on the 'Subjection of Women,' deduced their disabilities from that primitive condition of the human race in which man employed his superior physical strength to coerce woman to his will. Such being the origin of the subjection of women, the disabilities complained of Mr. Mill regarded as, in ethnological phrase, "survivals" from a state of society in which physical force was supreme. To this explanation Mr.

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Smith demurs, and contends that the "lot of the woman has not been determined by the will of the man, at least in any considerable degree." According to him it had its origin in those circumstances which made it expedient, on public grounds, that in the early stages of civilization the family should be socially, legally, and politically a unit. Into this portion of the controversy, however, I cannot see that there would be any advantage in entering. Whether Mr. Mill was right or wrong in his view of the historical question, he was at all events eminently successful in the purpose for which he introduced the discussion. He has secured a hearing for the cause of woman, so effectually, that we may now at least feel confident that it will not be ultimately decided on other grounds than those of reason and justice. Nor does it in truth matter whether in approaching the question of Woman Suffrage we adopt Mr. Mill's or Mr. Smith's theory. Both alike regard the existing disabilities of women as "survivals" —Mr. Mill, as survivals from a very early period in which physical force was supreme; Mr. Smith as survivals from the state of things which produced the peculiar constitution of the patriarchal family; but both as survivals, and therefore as belonging to a condition of life which has passed away. The point is thus of purely archæological interest, while the real question now before the public is, not as to the origin of woman's disabilities, but as to their present expediency; "the interest of the whole community," to borrow once more Mr. Smith's language, being "the test."

In the Bill lately before Parliament the intention of the framers, as the reader is aware, was to confer the suffrage on widows and spinsters only; married women having been expressly excluded from its operation. Mr. Smith, in entering on the discussion, is naturally anxious to deal with the question in its broadest form, and accordingly declines to be bound by this limited conception of it. He may be perfectly justified in this course; but the reasons given by him for extending the scope of the controversy are by no means convincing. To say that "marriage could hardly be treated as

politically penal" is to put the argument for his view into a neat phrase; but Englishmen have not hitherto been much governed by phrases, and I hope they are not now going to begin to be. The political disqualification which attaches to the military and naval services, as well as to some branches of the civil service, might also be described as a "penal" incident of those honourable callings, but it is nevertheless maintained; and I have no doubt that if people come to believe that it is advantageous to give the suffrage to widows and spinsters, but disadvantageous to extend it to married women, they will set epigrams at defiance, and draw the line exactly where it is drawn in Mr. Forsyth's Bill. Again, I deny altogether that there is anything in the logic of the case that would compel those who have given the suffrage to women, to take the further step of admitting them to Parliament. "Surely," says Mr. Smith, "she who gives the mandate is competent herself to carry it"—on the principle, I suppose, that—

"Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat."

But granting, for argument's sake, that she is competent to carry *her own* mandate, it still does not follow that she is competent to carry the mandates of *other people;* and this is what the right to a seat in Parliament means. Indeed it is only quite lately that the law has ceased to distinguish between the right to vote and the right to be elected; * and if the distinction no longer exists, its abolition has been due, not in the least to a desire for logical consistency, but simply to the fact that the qualification required by the law for a seat in Parliament was found in practice ineffective for its purpose and in other ways mischievous. If it prove on full examination that the character and circumstances of women are such as to render their admission to Parliament unadvisable on public grounds, those who are in favour of giving them the suffrage will be perfectly within their right in taking their stand at this point, and in refusing to grant them

* In the case of clergymen, as well as in other cases, the distinction is still maintained.

the larger concession. For my own part, as I do not believe that any detriment would come from including married women with others in the grant of the suffrage, or from the admission of women to Parliament, I am quite willing to argue the question on the broader ground on which Mr. Smith desires to place it.*

The most important argument advanced by Mr. Smith against the policy under consideration is contained in the following passages:—"The question whether Female Suffrage on an extended scale is good for the whole community is probably identical, practically speaking, with the question whether it is good for us to have free institutions or not. Absolute monarchy is founded on personal loyalty. Free institutions are founded on the love of liberty, or, to speak more properly, on the preference of legal to personal government. But the love of liberty and the desire of being governed by law alone appear to be characteristically male" (p. 145). From this position Mr. Smith concludes that "to give women the franchise is simply to give them the power of putting an end actually and virtually to all franchises together." "It may not be easy," he allows, "to say beforehand what course the demolition of free institutions by Female Suffrage would take." "But," he holds, "there can be little doubt that in all cases, if power were put into the hands of the women, free government, and with it liberty of opinion, would fall."

It cannot be denied that the consequences here indicated as likely to follow from the extension of the suffrage to women are sufficiently serious; and we may admit that a

* I cannot, however, go the length that Mr. Smith appears inclined to go in one passage, where he argues, or seems to argue, that all who are in favour of woman suffrage, are bound by their own principles to vote, under all circumstances, for woman candidates. He would scarcely, I presume, contend that all who are in favour of Catholic Emancipation are bound, when a Catholic offers himself, to vote for one; and, similarly, that those who favour Jewish Emancipation are bound, when they can, to vote for Jews; but, unless he is prepared to go this length, on what ground does he hold that the advocates of woman suffrage in America must, "if they had considered the consequences of their own principles," have voted for Mrs. Victoria Woodhull?

better reason could not easily be imagined for withholding anything from anybody than that its concession "would probably overturn the institutions on which the hopes of the world rest." But the greatness of a fear does not prove that it rests on solid grounds; and when we come to examine the grounds of Mr. Smith's dark forebodings, we find them about as substantial as the stuff that dreams are made of. "The female need of protection," he says, "of which, so long as women remain physically weak, and so long as they are mothers, it will be impossible to get rid, is apparently accompanied by a preference for personal government." "Women are priest-ridden;" but this does not go to the root of the "reactionary tendency characteristic of the sex." The effect of those physical and physiological peculiarities is, Mr. Smith thinks, to give "an almost uniform bias to the political sentiments of women;" this bias being opposed to law and liberty, and in favour of personal government; so that women may be trusted, whenever an opportunity offers, to act *en masse* for the destruction of free institutions.

Women in these passages are spoken of as if, so to speak, *in vacuo:* it is not to the women of any particular country or age that the description applies, but to woman in the abstract. In conformity with this, the illustrations which follow are taken by Mr. Smith from various ages and countries—I should have said with tolerable impartiality, if it were not that, strangely enough, scarcely any reference is made to the women of modern England. And yet it is the women of modern England whose case is in issue. Now this is a point of some importance; because it is quite possible, at least as I regard it—not being a believer in "natural rights"—that the suffrage may be a good thing for women in certain stages of social progress, as for men, but a bad thing for both where the social conditions are different. This being so, it is not obvious how Mr. Smith helps the intelligent discussion of the question by taking his examples at random from ancient Rome, Italy, France, the United States, England in the seventeenth century—in a word, from any source where

he can find cases to suit his purpose, but without the least reference to the special circumstances of each case. I have no desire to restrict unduly the range of the discussion; but I think that, when examples are taken from foreign countries, and still more when they are taken from former ages, with a view to prejudice the claims of Englishwomen to the franchise, some attempt should be made to show that the cases cited are really pertinent to the question in hand.

Turning, then, to the persons and country immediately concerned, let us consider how far the state of things here affords any support to Mr. Smith's speculations. I will not attempt to deny that there may be priest-ridden women in England, possibly in considerable numbers; nor will I dispute what some well-informed persons have asserted, that the passing of a Woman Suffrage Bill would not improbably, at all events for a time, give an accession of political influence to the clergy. But granting this, and even conceding, for the sake of argument, Mr. Smith's theory as to the natural bias of the female mind, we are still a long way off from the terrible catastrophe that his fears portend. "Female Suffrage," he says, "would give a vast increase of power to the clergy;" but we have still to ask if the English clergy, Church and Nonconformist, are, as a body, ready to join in a crusade against free institutions. I am quite unable to discover what the grounds are for such a supposition; but if this cannot be assumed, then their influence would not be exercised in the direction Mr. Smith apprehends, and his fears for free institutions are groundless. Even if we were to make the extravagant supposition that the clergy are to a man in favour of personal government and absolutism, there would still be husbands, fathers, and brothers, whose appeals on behalf of free government would not surely pass altogether unheeded. Is it being over-sanguine to assume that at the worst a sufficient number of women would be kept back from the polls to leave the victory with the cause that is "characteristically male?"

In short, we have only to attempt to realise the several

conditions, *all of which would need to be fulfilled before the catastrophe which Mr. Smith dreads could even be approached,* in order to perceive the extravagant improbability, if not intrinsic absurdity, of his apprehensions. But instead of attempting to follow further the possible consequences of social and political combinations which are never likely to have any existence outside Mr. Smith's fancy, let us consider for a moment the theory he has advanced as to the mental constitution of women, which lies at the bottom of the whole speculation. Women, it seems, are so constituted by nature as to be incapable of the "love of liberty, and the desire of being governed by law;" and this results from a "sentiment inherent in the female temperament, formed by the normal functions and circumstances of the sex." Now if this be so—if the sentiments of women with regard to government and political institutions are thus determined by physiological causes too powerful to be modified by education and experience, then those sentiments would in all countries and under all conditions of society be essentially the same. But is this the fact? On the contrary, is it not matter of common remark that the whole attitude of women towards politics is strikingly different in different countries; that it is one thing in England, another in the United States, something different from either in France and Italy, and something different from all in Turkey and the East? and, not to travel beyond the range of the present controversy, do we not find within the United Kingdom almost every variety of political opinion prevailing amongst women, according to the circumstances of their education and social surroundings? It may be true that the interest taken by women in politics has hitherto been in general somewhat languid; that, as a body, they are less alive than men to the advantages of political liberty and of legal government. But is not this precisely what was to be expected, supposing their political opinions to be subject to the same influences which determine the political opinions of men? As a rule they have from the beginning of things been excluded from politics; their whole education

has been contrived, one might say, with the deliberate purpose of giving to their sentiments an entirely different bent; home and private life have been inculcated on them as the only proper sphere for their ambition; yet in spite of these disadvantages, by merely mixing in society with men who take an interest in politics, a very great number of women have come to share that interest, while there are some, as Mr. Smith admits—I will add a rapidly increasing number—"eminently capable of understanding and discussing political questions." Can it be said that of the women who in this country take an interest in politics the bias of their political sentiments is uniformly in one direction, and this—the direction of personal government and absolutism? I can only say, if this be Mr. Smith's experience, it is singularly different from mine. No doubt there are women in abundance who care nothing for politics, and who would be quite content to live under any government which offered a fair promise of peace and security; but may not precisely the same be said of no inconsiderable number of men even in England? Would it not be easy to find men enough, and these by no means amongst the residuum, who take no interest at all in politics, and who, so far as they are concerned, would be willing to hand over the destinies of the human race to-morrow to a Cæsar, or to any one else who, they had reason to believe, would maintain the rights of property, and keep their own precious persons safe? This state of feeling amongst some men is not considered to prove that men in general are unfitted by nature for the functions of citizenship under a free government; and when we meet exactly the same phenomenon amongst women, why are we to deduce from it a conclusion which in the case of men we should repudiate?

In short, the patent facts of experience in this country (and if here or anywhere the facts are as I have stated them, they suffice to dispose of Mr. Smith's theory) are consistent with one supposition and with one supposition only—the existence in women of political capabilities which may be

developed in almost any direction, according to the nature of the influences brought to bear upon them. It may very well be that, when experience has furnished us with sufficient data for observation, a something will prove to be discernible in the political opinions of the two sexes in the nature of a characteristic quality; but at present conjecture upon this subject is manifestly premature; and Mr. Smith's arrow, apparently shot at a venture, we may confidently say, has not hit the mark. The love of liberty and the desire of being governed by law are feelings which have as yet been developed in but a very small proportion of men; they have been developed in a still smaller proportion of women, but the difference is not greater than the difference in the education and circumstances of the two sexes is amply sufficient to account for.

Mr. Smith having thoroughly frightened himself by the chimeras his imagination had conjured up as the probable result of giving the Suffrage to Women, puts the question:— "But would the men submit?" and he resorts to an ingenious, though perhaps questionable, speculation on the ultimate sanctions of law, to show that they would not. If the laws passed by women were such as men disapproved of, "the men," he says, "would, of course, refuse execution; law would be set at defiance, and government would be overturned" (p. 146). When, therefore, "the female vote" came to be taken "on the fate of free institutions," and the decree for their abolition went forth, it seems that, after all, it would prove mere *brutum fulmen*. The consummation would never take place; and the institutions on which the hopes of the world rest would remain erect, unharmed amid the impotent feminine rage surging around, much (if one may venture on a profane illustration) like one of those gin palaces in the United States that has held its ground against the psalmody of the whisky crusaders. One would have thought that this reflection would have brought some solace to Mr. Smith's soul; but, strange to say, he regards it as an aggravation of the impending evils; and would apparently

be better pleased if, in the supposed contingency, men in general should exhibit the same implicit subserviency which, he tells us, has been shown by a man, somewhere in the United States, who, under his wife's compulsion, is in the habit of working for her as a hired labourer—a fact, by the way, not very happily illustrating his theory of the ultimate sanctions of law.

In truth this portion of Mr. Smith's argument—and it is in a logical sense the very heart of his case, in such sort, that, this part failing, the whole collapses—is so utterly—I will not say, weak—but so utterly unlike the sort of argument ordinarily to be found in his political writings, that it is difficult to resist the impression that it does not represent the real grounds of his conviction, but is rather a theory excogitated after conviction to satisfy that intellectual craving which an opinion formed on other grounds than reason invariably produces. And this impression is confirmed, if not reduced to certainty, as we continue the perusal of his essay. In an early passage Mr. Smith had told us that he "himself once signed a petition for Female Household Suffrage got up by Mr. Mill;" adding that, when he signed it, he "had not seen the public life of women in the United States." Further on he gives us an account of this public life, as he conceives it; and I have no doubt that we have here disclosed to us the real source, if not of his present opinions on Woman Suffrage, at least of the intensity with which they are held. In the United States, he says, "a passion for emulating the male sex has undoubtedly taken possession of some of the women, as it took possession of women under the Roman empire, who began to play the gladiator when other excitements were exhausted." It seems further that there are women in the United States who claim, "in virtue of 'superior complexity of organisation,' not only political equality but absolute supremacy over man, of whom one has given to the movement the name of the 'Revolt of Woman.'" Again, "in the United States the privileges of women may be said to extend to impunity, not only for ordinary outrage,

but for murder. The poisoner whose guilt has been proved by overwhelming evidence, is let off because she is a woman; there is a sentimental scene between her and her advocate in court, and afterwards she appears as a public lecturer.* The Whisky Crusade shows that women are practically above the law." Once more it appears that "in the United States the grievance of which most is heard is the tyrannical stringency of the marriage tie. . . . Some of the language used . . . if reproduced might unfairly predjudice the case." Already "male legislatures in the United States have carried the liberty of divorce so far, that the next step would be the total abolition of marriage and the destruction of the family;" and this is followed by a story of "a woman who accomplished a divorce by simply shutting the door of the house, which was her own property, in her husband's face." It would be easy, had I space at my command, to add to these extracts; but the foregoing will suffice. One is led to ask what is the bearing of such statements, assuming the facts to be all correctly given, upon the question of Woman Suffrage? Mr. Smith has not troubled himself to point this out—apparently has never

*Mr. Smith gives neither dates nor places, but there can be little doubt that in the allusion in the text two distinct transactions are confounded: the inference suggested, moreover, is such as the facts by no means warrant. "The poisoner whose guilt has been proved by overwhelming evidence," but who is "let off," must, I think, refer to the case of a woman tried some time ago in one of the eastern cities, I think Baltimore. It is true she was "let off," but, as an American barrister informs me, with perfect propriety; the evidence against her not being sufficient to sustain the charge. In this case there was no sentimental scene in court, and no appearance afterwards as a public lecturer. These latter incidents belong to a case which occurred in San Francisco, in which a woman, Laura Fair by name, was tried, not for poisoning, but for shooting her paramour in the open street, and was acquitted in the face of the most conclusive evidence. The advocate, however, as I am informed, was passive in "the sentimental scene," and afterwards sued the lady for his fees. It is true, too, that she appeared shortly afterwards as a public lecturer; but Mr. Smith omits to add—what is surely pertinent to the question in hand—that she was hooted by the audience from the platform, and found it prudent to leave the town without delay. No one who knows anything of the United States would regard San Francisco as a typical American city; it is rather an extreme example of all that is most pronounced in American rowdyism; yet even in San Francisco we find that popular feeling on the immunity of women from penalties for crime is something very different from what Mr. Smith represents it.

considered it; but finds it simpler to throw in such sensational allusions here and there as a sort of garnishing for his argument, trusting no doubt that they will produce upon the minds of his readers the same impression which they have evidently made upon his own. The case seems to be this:—Mr. Smith's finer susceptibilities have been rudely shocked by the antics of a sort of Mænad sisterhood holding their revels here and there in the vast territory of the United States; and a state of mind has supervened which leads him to regard with disfavour any cause with which these women happen to be associated. Woman Suffrage, unfortunately, is one of those causes; and therefore Mr. Smith is opposed to Woman Suffrage.

Now, to let one's opinions be formed in this way is not to be guided by experience, as some people would have us believe. Let not anyone suppose that Mr. Smith has any such solid support for the views advanced in his essay. Woman Suffrage has nowhere yet, out of Utah, been tried in the United States; whereas we in England have witnessed its working at least in our municipal and school-board elections. In point of experience, therefore, we who have remained at home have the advantage of Mr. Smith. His sojourn in America, however, has brought to his notice the sort of women—or, more properly, *a* sort of women—who contrive to make themselves conspicuous in the United States in social and political agitations. It may be allowed that, as depicted by him, they are not a gracious band; though hardly less attractive than some of the male politicians who figure at Caucuses, Rings, and other political gatherings in the same country. Is Mr. Smith, in disgust at this latter product of American institutions, prepared to abolish male suffrage, and with it representative government—to abolish it not merely in the United States, but here and everywhere? for to this length does his argument against Woman Suffrage, drawn from analogous manifestations on the part of some American women, carry him.

As I have said, Mr. Smith has not pointed out the bearing

of his sensational allusions on the question of Woman Suffrage. If he intended them to support his case he was undoubtedly prudent in not doing so. Let us consider one or two of them in connection with the question at issue. We are told, for example, that "in the United States the privileges of women may be said to extend to impunity, not only for ordinary outrage, but for murder;" and then comes the story of the poisoner which I have examined in a note. Further on he says, "if the women ask for the suffrage, say some American publicists, they must have it; and in the same way, everything that a child cries for is apt to be given it without reflection as to the consequences of the indulgence." Now, assuming (what I am by no means disposed to admit) that the state of feeling towards women in the United States is such as these remarks suggest, it is to be observed in the first place that it is a state of feeling which has grown up, not under a female, but under an exclusively male, suffrage, and it is not easy to believe that the extension of the suffrage to women could make it worse. In the next place, the feeling in question is merely an exaggeration of that sickly sentimentalism regarding woman and all that concerns her which has come down to us from times of chivalry, and which has hitherto been fostered by the careful exclusion of women from political life, as well as from the great majority of useful and rational occupations. In the United States, a portion of the women appear, from Mr. Smith's account, to have suddenly broken loose from many of these restraints; and the use they are making of their freedom appears to be about as wise and edifying as the use which men commonly make of political freedom when it has been suddenly conferred upon them after centuries of servitude. The sentiment deserves all the scorn that Mr. Smith pours upon it; but the corrective for it, if it exists, is not to be found in a continuance of the state of things which produced it, but in opening to women those spheres of action from which they have been hitherto debarred, and in subjecting them to the free and bracing air of equality, alike in rights and in responsibilities, with men.

And this consideration furnishes the answer to another of Mr. Smith's arguments. He considers that the admission of women to the suffrage, instead of mitigating, is likely to aggravate the violence of political strife, and in support of this view refers to the Reign of Terror, the revolt of the Commune, and the American Civil War. I must own this latter reference has taken me by surprise. I have never heard before that the women of the United States during the civil war "notoriously rivalled the men in fury and atrocity." I remember some very great atrocities committed during that war; for example, the massacre at Fort Pillow, the treatment of prisoners of war in some of the Southern military hospitals, the attempts to burn down some of the public buildings and hotels in New York; but these were all committed by men, and I have never heard of similar acts committed or attempted by American women. If Mr. Smith knows of any such, he ought to enlighten the world by stating them, or else withdraw his injurious assertion. On the other hand, I have heard, and I imagine so must Mr. Smith, of the magnificent devotion to their country shown by the women of the Northern States in organising and working hospital corps, and in actual services rendered to the wounded on the field, mitigating thus the hardships and horrors of war in a manner to reflect honour on their country and on their sex. As to the women of the Reign of Terror and the Commune, they were, at all events, not worse than the men; and the shocking crimes committed by both, so far as they are not purely mythical, are, no doubt, referable to the same causes—the tremendous excitement of the time, the wild doctrines current, and, above all, the absolute inexperience in political affairs of those to whom power for the moment fell.

Again, what is the bearing of Mr. Smith's statements regarding the great freedom of divorce existing in some of the States of the Union? "Male legislators," it seems, "have already carried the liberty of divorce so far that the next step would be the total abolition of marriage and the

destruction of the family." Does it follow from this that female, or rather mixed, legislatures would go further in the same direction? for this seems to be the drift of this portion of Mr. Smith's remarks. In an earlier part of his essay he had told us that it was inherent in the nature of women to be subservient to the clergy: he now suggests that, if admitted to the suffrage, they would probably enact the abrogation of the marriage tie. Perhaps he sees his way to reconciling these two opinions, but it is not obvious on the surface, any more than it is easy to reconcile the latter with what he tells us a few lines lower down, that women have a far deeper interest in maintaining the stringency of the marriage tie than men. If so, then, one naturally asks, why will they not use their influence to maintain it? Are they such imbeciles as not to discern their interest in so important a matter, or, discerning it, to throw their weight into the scale adverse to their most vital concerns? Here again Mr. Smith answers himself: he tells us, "the women themselves [I presume the Mænads] have now, it is said, begun to draw back."

I now turn to a side of the question on which Mr. Smith lays very great stress, and of which I am not in the least disposed to underrate the importance—the extension of the suffrage to married women. I do not yield to Mr. Smith, or to anyone, in the firmness of my conviction that the family is at the bottom of our existing civilization, and I should, for my part, regard as dearly purchased any gain in material or political well-being which should introduce a jar or weakness into this pivot of our social system. But I believe that to open political life to women, far from being fraught with the disastrous consequences Mr. Smith anticipates, would, taking things in their entire scope, be productive of quite opposite effects. If I were asked to name the principal element of weakness in the family as things now stand, I should have no hesitation in pointing to the want of sufficient subjects of common interest between man and woman. It is owing to this that matrimonial engagements are entered into so rarely

on the basis of any broad intellectual sympathy, such as might furnish some security for lasting affection, and so often at the bidding of impulses and fancies that do not outlive the honeymoon; and it is owing to the same cause that so very large a proportion of the lives of most husbands and wives are spent practically apart, with little or no knowledge on the part of either of the objects or aims that engross the greater portion of the other's thoughts and energies. That under such circumstances the marriage tie is, on the whole, maintained as well as it is, seems rather matter for wonder; and to argue that the introduction of a new source of very profound common interest for husband and wife must of necessity weaken the bond, is, in my opinion, to evince a singular inability to appreciate the real dangers now besetting the institution. It is true, no doubt, that every new subject of common interest for husband and wife, must, from the nature of the case, constitute also a new possible occasion for disagreement; but if this is to be accounted a good reason for excluding women from politics, they might with equal justice be excluded from literature, from the fine arts, from everything in which men also take an interest—above all from religion. The value of these several pursuits as bonds and cements of married life is just in proportion to the degree of common interest which husbands and wives take in them, and just in the same proportion also is the possible danger that they may become the grounds of dissension. Mr. Smith is greatly scandalised at the prospect of a man and his wife taking opposite sides in politics. I cannot see that it would be at all more scandalous than that a man and his wife should take opposite sides in religion—going, for example, every Sunday to different places of worship, where each hears the creed of the other denounced as soul-destroying and damnable. It will serve to throw light upon the present problem if we consider for a moment how it happens that this latter spectacle is on the whole so rarely presented; and that, even where the event occurs, it is so frequently found consistent with tolerable harmony in married life.

The explanation, I have no doubt, is of this kind: where difference of religion consists with matrimonial happiness, it will generally be found that one or both of the partners do not take a very deep interest in the creeds they profess; while, on the other hand, where people do feel strongly on religion, they generally take care, in forming matrimonial alliances, to consort with those who, on fundamental points, are of the same opinion with themselves. Now it seems to me that this may serve to illustrate for us what will be the practical working of politics in respect to married life when women begin to receive a political education, or at least to learn as much about politics, and take as much or as little interest in them as men do. A number only too large of men and women will probably continue for long enough to take but small interest in public affairs, and these will marry, as they do now, with little reference to each other's political opinions; but the danger of discord from politics under such circumstances would be infinitesimal. The only cases in which this danger would become serious would be when both husband and wife were strong politicians. Here, no doubt, there would be danger; though no greater, I think, than when two persons of strong but opposite religious convictions enter into marriage. Mr. Smith seems to think that, because "religion is an affair of the other world," it is less likely than politics to be an occasion of strife. This is probable enough when people do not believe in another world; but when they do, and believe also that the fate of people there will depend on what they believe in this, I cannot see the wisdom of his remark. Some of the worst and cruellest wars that have ever been waged have been religious wars; and so notoriously is religion an engenderer of strife, that it is now scarcely good manners to moot a religious question in private society, where politics are quite freely and amicably discussed. If persons of genuine but different religious opinions can contrive to get on together in married life, they would certainly not be likely to be severed by political differences, however strongly their opinions might be held. But, however this

may be, my argument is that, in practice, such cases would very rarely occur. When politics became a subject of interest alike for men and for women, it would very soon become a principal consideration in determining matrimonial alliances. Even now this is the case to some extent, and it will no doubt become more and more so as the political education of women advances. Mr. Smith's question, therefore, "Would the harmony of most households bear the strain?" may be answered by saying that in very few households would there be any strain to bear; while in most—at least in those in which politics were intelligently cultivated—home life, no longer the vapid thing it is so often now, would acquire a new element of interest, and the family would be held together by powerful sympathies that now lie undeveloped.

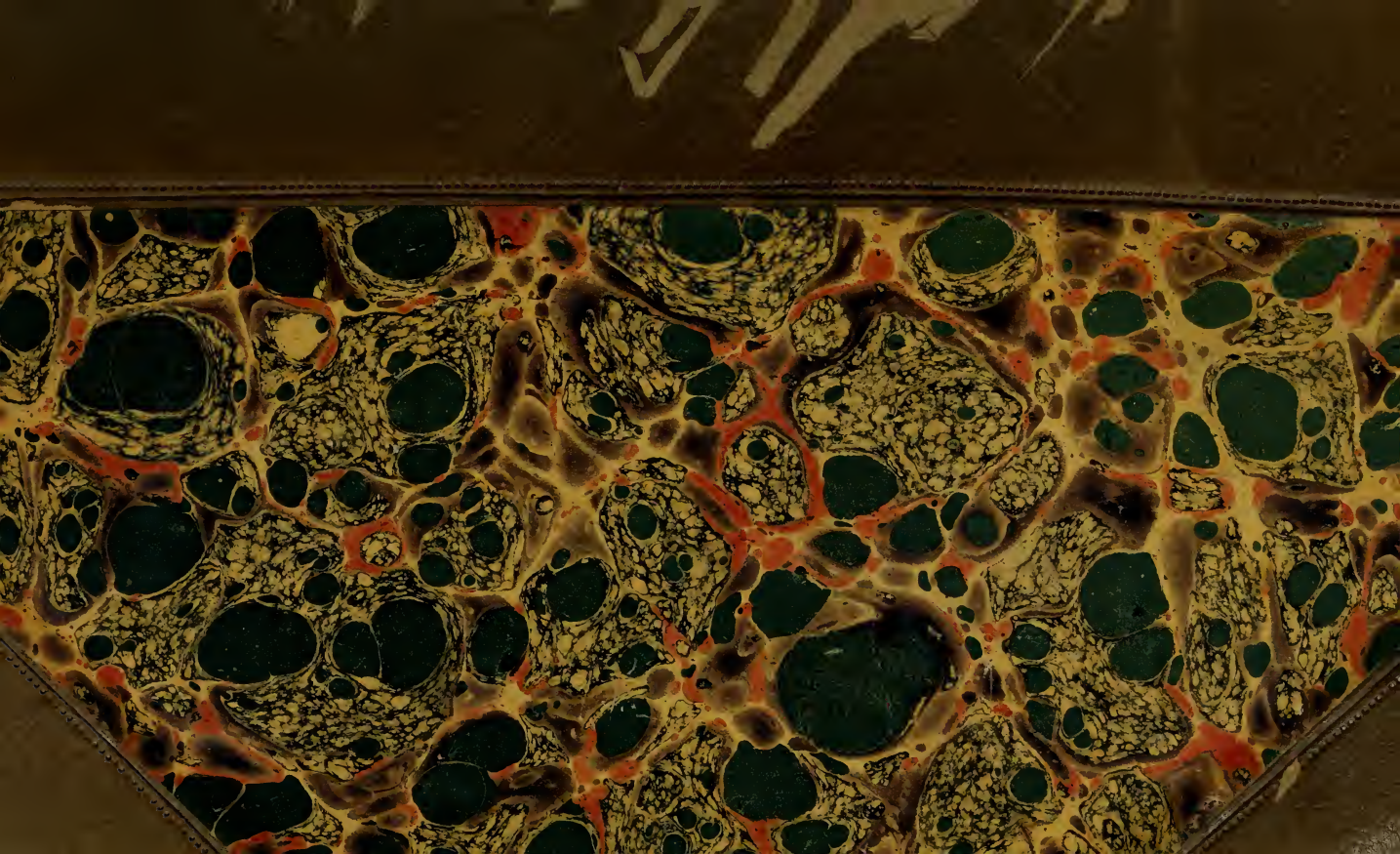
Mr. Smith seems to think that, if women are only excluded from the suffrage, the harmony of married life can never be endangered by politics; but this is to attribute to the mere right of voting a degree of efficacy which I, for one, am not disposed to allow to it. If women only come to take an interest in politics—it matters not whether they have the suffrage or not—all the danger that can arise from the suffrage to married life will be already incurred. It is not the giving of a vote every four or five years that constitutes the danger, if danger there be; but the habitual mental attitude of husband and wife towards each other. Those, therefore, who share Mr. Smith's apprehensions on the present subject, ought clearly to take their stand against the suffrage movement very much higher up. They ought to oppose every extension of female education which may reasonably be expected to lead women to take an interest in politics. The intelligent study of history should, in the first place, be rigidly proscribed. Political economy would be excluded as a matter of course; and along with it, that large and increasing class of studies embraced under the name "social." Every one of these, intelligently cultivated, leads inevitably, where faculty is not wanting, to an interest in

contemporary politics; and if women are to be shut out from this field of ideas, lest perchance they should adopt opinions which should not be those of their future husbands, their education ought at once to be truncated by this large segment. Mr. Smith indeed suggests that women who are capable of discussing political questions "will find a sphere in the press." Does he then suppose that there would be less danger to the harmony of married life from women writing in the press—writing leaders, perhaps, for strong party papers—than from tendering a vote at the polls every four or five years? Besides, the suggestion falls utterly short of the requirements of the case. The number of women who are capable, or who desire, to find a sphere in the press are never likely to be more than a handful: the numbers who desire a liberal education, in the best and broadest sense of that word, and who are or may become quite fitted to form sound opinions on political questions, are already to be numbered by thousands, perhaps I might say by tens of thousands: what their numbers will become in another generation, I will not pretend to conjecture. Mr. Smith's suggestion, therefore, though graciously meant, is hardly to the purpose. Plainly nothing short of lopping off from the education of women some of the most important branches of human knowledge will meet the difficulty.

I must, before concluding, refer briefly (for my space is all but exhausted) to an aspect of the case touched on at the opening of these remarks—the probability of the admission of women to Parliament as a consequence of giving them the suffrage. As I have already pointed out, the latter concession by no means necessarily involves the former; so that it is quite open to those who are in favour of Woman Suffrage to decline, if they see fit to do so, to concede the latter privilege. For my own part, however, I desire to say frankly that I am in favour of removing, not only this, but all legal impediments whatever, to the freest choice by women of a career whether in political or in civil life. It is not that I look forward to women taking advantage, in any very large

degree, of the new fields of activity that would thus be opened to them; for I am not of Mr. Smith's opinion, that women can be "unsexed" by Acts of Parliament. I believe that all the substantial reasons of convenience, natural aptitude, and taste, which, in the division of labour between men and women, make it desirable that women should, as a rule, take charge of the domestic half of the world's work, and men of that which is transacted out of doors, will, whatever laws we may pass, remain in their full force, and will keep the general distribution of occupations between the sexes, even under the freest competition, in the main not very different from what it now is. Still, though this, as I believe, will be the rule, there will no doubt be numerous exceptions to it; and why should there not be? If some women find it suitable to their circumstances and to their natural talents or taste to embrace careers now open only to men, why should they be debarred from turning their abilities to the best account? If they make mistakes, as very possibly at first many will, and adopt unsuitable occupations, they will discover their mistakes as men do now, by experience, and their failures will serve as a warning to others. If, on the other hand, they prove successful in their ventures, their success can only be a gain for themselves and for society at large. All this would hold true, even though the alternative of marriage and domestic life were really open to every woman in the country. But it is a fact of very great importance as regards the practical aspect of this question that no inconsiderable number of women in this country pass, and cannot but pass, their lives unmarried. Mr. Smith, indeed, regards this as connected "with an abnormal and possibly transient state of things." For my part I regard it as a perfectly normal phenomenon in such a country as England, and, therefore, as likely to endure. In any case, while it lasts, the exclusion of women from professional and other careers is something more than a theoretical injustice. It is a real and substantial wrong, involving penury and all its consequences, inflicted on a large number of persons whose only crime is

their sex, and who only ask to be permitted to earn a livelihood by making themselves useful to their fellow creatures. The claim to be admitted to Parliament, indeed, if it should be advanced (which it has not yet been), would stand on somewhat different ground. Exclusion in this case would not mean exclusion from the means of earning a livelihood, and therefore the reasons in favour of the claim are undoubtedly less strong than those which may be urged in favour of opening professional and industrial careers; but why should women not be allowed the fullest and freest use of their faculties in any walk of life, whether lucrative or otherwise, in which any competent portion of the community may think it expedient to employ them? At all events the onus of proof lies with those who would resist such a claim; and if opponents have nothing better to urge than the fatuous jokes which have hitherto been the staple of their argument, but from which Mr. Smith has had the good taste to abstain, the case against women is certainly not a strong one. Whether many women, if the opportunity offered, would be ambitious of a parliamentary career; or whether, in this case, they would find many constituencies disposed to elect them, are questions, the consideration of which may perhaps be left, without disadvantage, to a future day.

THE END.

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